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Message Text

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16
ACTION NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 IO-10 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07

L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

AID-05 SAM-01 SAB-01 TRSE-00 OMB-01 /072 W
---------- 122415
R 111458Z APR 75
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8083
INFO AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMCONSUL BOMBAY
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMCONSUL MADRAS

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, IN
SUBJECT: MORARJI DESAI'S FAST

REF: NEW DELHI 4631

SUMMARY: MORARJI DESAI'S FAST IS IN ITS FIFTH DAY AND NO COM-
PROMISE IS YET IN SIGHT. END SUMMARY.

1. MORARJI DESAI'S "FAST UNTO DEATH" ENTERED ITS FIFTH DAY,
APRIL 11. AN AP INDIAN REPORTER WHO SAW DESAI'S DOCTOR APRIL
11 TOLD AN EMBASSY LOCAL EMPLOYEE THAT THE 79-YEAR-OLD CONGRESS-
O POLITICIAN IS "GETTING PROGRESSIVELY WEAKER AND MORE TIRED"
BUT REMAINS "CHEERFUL" AND IN FULL COMMAND OF HIS SENSES. ACCORDING
TO DESAI'S DOCTOR'S PUBLISHED REPORTS, DESAI HAS LOST 12 POUNDS
AND "ALBUMIN AND CASTS HAVE APPEARED IN HIS URINE INDICATING
IMPAIRMENT OF KIDNEY FUNCTION."

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2. THE NON-CPI OPPOSITION PARTIES ARE DOING THEIR BEST TO BLAME

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MRS. GANDHI AND THE CONGRESS PARTY FOR DESAI'S SELF-APPOINTED FAST. J.P. NARAYAN HAS CALLED FOR COUNTRYWIDE PUBLIC RALLIES ON APRIL 13 IN SUPPORT OF DESAI. SHEIKH ABDULLAH HAS ALSO GOTTEN INTO THE ACT BY SENDING A LETTER TO DESAI REQUESTING HIM TO ABANDON HIS FAST AND "SPARE THE COUNTRY THE AGONY OF ITS CONSEQUENCES." IN A SEPARATE LETTER TO MRS. GANDHI, HE URGED THE PRIME MINISTER TO SEEK AN ACCORD WITH DESAI. DURING A FOUR-HOUR APRIL 10 DEBATE IN THE LIK SABHA, JANA SANGH, BHARTIYA LOK DAL CON-GRESS-O SPOKESMEN AND AN INDEPENDENT PRO-J.P. NARAYAN MP FROM GUJARAT QUOTED ASSURANCES BY MINISTERS IN PARLIAMENT DURING 1974 THAT THE GUJARAT ELECTIONS WOULD BE HELD FOLLOWING THE DECENNIAL DELIMITATION EXERCISE IN THE STATE-COMPLETED IN NOVEMBER 1974 - AND THE REVISION OF ELECTORAL ROLLS - COMPLETED IN JANUARY 1975. THEY DEMANDED THAT THE GOI REDEEM ITS PLEDGES AND "SAVE" DESAI'S LIFE BY HOLDING THE GUJARAT ELECTIONS BY THE END OF MAY. IN RESPONSE, GOI MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS BRAHMANANDA REDDY REITERATED THE GOI'S POSITION THAT THE SEVERITY OF THE DROUGHT IN GUJARAT WOULD PEAK IN THE MONTHS OF MAY AND JUNE WHEN THE STATE ADMINISTRATION WILL BE COMPLETELY INVOLVED IN RELIEF OPERATIONS. HE CONFIRMED THAT THE "ELECTION PROCESS" WILL BE "SET IN MOTION" IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE MONSOON, AND ARGUED THAT THE "MERE DIFFERENCE" OF THREE OR FOUR MONTHS BETWEEN DESAI'S DEADLINE AND THE GOI'S ELECTION COMMITMENT DO NOT JUSTIFY THE "EXTRAORDINARY" STEP OF A FAST. REDDY COMPLIMENTED DESAI AS "AN ELDER LEADER, EXPERIENCED ADMINISTRATOR AND ONE OF THE FEW SURVIVORS OF THE OLD GUARD", PROCLAIMED THAT THE GOVERNMENT WAS "PROFOUNDLY SAD" ABOUT HIS DECISION, AND URGED THE OPPOSITION TO USE ITS INFLUENCE TO END THE FAST.

3. IN AN APRIL 10 PUBLIC STATEMENT, DESAI HIMSELF REJECTED CALLS TO END HIS FAST AND RULED OUT ANY COMPROMISE ON HIS ELECTION TIMETABLE "BEFORE THE MONSOONS." THIS IS BEING INTERPRETED AS A DE FACTO EXTENSION OF HISELECTION DEADLINE UNTIL JUNE 15. CHANCES OF A "COMPROMISE" BEYOND THIS DATE ARE, HOWEVER, REMOTE. WE WOULD GUESS THAT DESAI CAN CONTINUE ON FOR AT LEAST ANOTHER WEEK, PROBABLY TWO AND POSSIBLY A MONTH BEFORE HIS LIFE IS SERIOUSLY IN DANGER.

4. HISTORICAL NOTE: IN POST-INDEPENDENCE INDIA, THERE HAVE BEEN TWO POLITICIANS WHO HAVE "FASTED UNTO DEATH" FOR A POLITICAL CAUSE.
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IN 1952, POTTI SRIRAMULU DIED AFTER A 58-DAY FAST IN SUPPORT OF A SEPARATE TELEGU STATE. IN 1969, EIGHTY-FIVE-YEAR-OLD DARSHAN SINGH PHERUMAN DIED ON THE 74TH DAY OF HIS FAST FOR THE INCLUSION OF DISPUTED TERRITORY WITHIN THE STATE OF PUNJAB. SRIRAMULU, LIKE DESAI, LIMITED HIS INTAKE TO WATER, SALT AND LEMON; PHERUMAN OCCASIONALLY SUPPLEMENTED THIS WITH TINY AMOUNTS OF FOOD.
SAXBE

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